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ABSTRACT

Parliamentary debate, while not a new format, has proliferated to all regions of the country. New and growing debate formats, while valuable for students and programs, must maintain sound pedagogical foundations if they are to be considered viable forensic alternatives. A reading of the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) rules as well as dialogues with many parliamentary debate educators indicates that parliamentary debate is designed as a viable form of educational debate, even though adjudicator and debater behaviors sometimes tell a different story. Although NPDA has never endorsed a set of rules for parliamentary debate, the majority of parliamentary "rules" are not only reasonable but facilitate sound argumentative practices. Most tournament administrators take an extremely conscientious approach to administering parliamentary divisions, but it seems the less experience a debate judge has, the more likely that judge is assigned to parliamentary debate. A second problem with parliamentary debate and tournament administration lies in the awarding of sweepstakes points for parliamentary debate. Topic writing is the final tournament administration concern that deals with parliamentary debate. Suggestions for improving parliamentary debate as a viable exercise in educational debate are: formalize topic writing, allow research in debate rounds, promote scholarship about parliamentary debate, evaluate criteria that emphasizes substance over style, ban time/space cases, conduct judging workshops and provide judging guidelines, define the mission of parliamentary debate, and add cross examination. (Contains nine references.) (RS)

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Point of Information:
Practical and Theoretical Concerns in Parliamentary Debate

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Speech Communication Association

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While I lived in St. Louis, I was often told that if I didn't like the weather I could wait until the next day and it would change. Today's collegiate debate world resembles St. Louis' weather. The rapid growth of several alternative debate formats gives forensic practitioners reason for concern. New and growing debate formats, while valuable for students and programs, must maintain sound pedagogical foundations if they are to be considered viable forensic alternatives.

Parliamentary debate, while certainly not a new format, has proliferated to all regions of the country. Being a subjective activity, debaters approach parliamentary debate in a variety of ways (just as they do other forms of debate and individual events). A combination of parliamentary debate rules and current practices motivates this paper. These concerns fall into three areas: (1) evolving norms of parliamentary debate, (2) rules governing the format, and (3) the administration of parliamentary debate at tournaments. This paper addresses these concerns, along with modest proposals for addressing what are argued to be shortfalls of parliamentary debate. This paper does not delegitimize parliamentary debate as a pointless educational and competitive alternative for forensic students. Truthfully, I view parliamentary debate as invaluable to a number of students who, for extenuating reasons, might not otherwise experience academic debate. Alternative debate formats should be encouraged

in college forensics (see, for example, Huebner, 1995; Adams and Cox, 1995; Cox and Jensen, 1989; Ryan, 1985)

The Evolving Norms of Parliamentary Debate

Practice impacts norms much more significantly than do rules or ideals. Even though some rules governing parliamentary debate may be geared toward one end, I look to the style and strategy played out in rounds for evidence of existing norms in this growing debate format.

The overwhelming message I receive from reading ballots, adjudicating rounds, and interacting with educators and students of parliamentary debate is that **parliamentary debate is not CEDA debate**. While this seems simple enough, it translates into behaviors and attitudes that are troubling for this forensic educator.

I firmly believe that for any debate to be a legitimate educational venture--regardless of format--it must apply basic theories of argumentation and reasoning. A reading of the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) rules as well as dialogues with many parliamentary debate educators convince me that parliamentary debate is designed as a viable form of educational debate, even though adjudicator and debater behaviors sometimes tell a different story.

While at one tournament held in the South-Central CEDA region and AFA District III, I gathered the front copies of parliamentary ballots from preliminary as well as elimination rounds. Comments were striking in terms of the critics'

attitudes regarding parliamentary and other forms of debate. One critic wrote,

> Good round. Given the talents of each speaker, I was hoping for more humor, but...such is life.

My favorite comment is,

> Have fun with this! You could have played and enjoyed the round. Instead you tried **CEDA-type of debate** (bold added for emphasis). SNOOZE.

Humor, while not mentioned in NPDA rules as a necessity, has evolved as a distinction between parliamentary and other debate formats. This is particularly interesting, given that early CEDA ballots listed humor as one of the evaluative criterion upon which speaker points should be based.

One round in particular illustrates my frustration with present norms in parliamentary debate. The resolution read "Elvis is alive and serving a term in the U.S. Senate" (an example of concerns I will outline later). The government interpreted this in a manner that required participants to be in an insane asylum. Comments from one critic voting in the majority were:

> If this were a serious debate, I'd be much more impressed with your style and approach.

> Government gives us a cute, humorous case. Opposition doesn't want to play. Too bad. Government wins by default. There was nothing unfair, illegal, or unethical in government approach.

> As a "serious" debate the points would be much higher--but failure to counter humorous _____ (word is illegible) equals low analysis/support/clash...

The second judge who upheld the proposition wrote:

> You have done a great job of making clear arguments and had this not been set in a insane asylum I would have voted for you. You guys are good. I like your arguments but to me you forgot that you too were insane. To an insane person they <u>want</u> to believe that Elvis is alive.
>
> You picked up on all of opposition's points and had you not reminded me that this was an asylum I would have vote(d) for opposition.

While I may read too much into these ballots, it appears to me that role-playing caused these critics to vote against what each, to an extent, admit was good if not superior argumentation. The dissenting ballot is one that I would like to frame:

> Before I begin I want to say two things: (1) you are all excellent speakers! (2) I am sorry that you had me as your judge. It seems that my idea of parliamentary debate is far different from yours. I believe that this is a debate activity that tests the skills and knowledge of current events and real issues of the competitors. Now, if you consider this round from the entertainment perspective--it was great! But, that's not how I view contest debate. I'd like you all to go home and think about why you are doing this and what do you hope to learn from this activity. As speakers you are all entertaining and engaging. But I believe that debate is an outgrowth of our discipline and if I demonstrated this round for accreditation when my university comes up for review I would be embarassed. You are great speakers and you are probably great debaters but you need to remember that substantive debate can be entertaining and engaging, and that is the real challenge of parliamentary debate. End of sermon.

I, along with many of my colleagues, have long argued that to change behaviors one must use the most powerful tool in the competitive setting--the ballot. The above ballot gratified me when I read it.

While at this same tournament, I administered an informal survey to assess what educators and competitors think about parliamentary debate. Primary differences that adjudicators saw between CEDA/NDT and parliamentary debate include speed and

delivery, evidence, manners, research preparation, flows, structure, and analysis. Competitors added to that list of topics, philosophical arguments, freedom, judges, and saliva staying in the mouth (really--I'm not kidding). I agree with most of these items listed as differences between the two formats.

Other questions on the surveys asked respondents to list what they view as three strengths and three weaknesses of parliamentary debate. The most frequently listed strengths, taken from coaches' surveys, were real world arguments, tests of quick thinking, organization, and humor. Weaknesses listed by coaches include the lack of cross-examination, the judging pool, talent, and sophistry. Student surveys revealed similar results, with some exceptions. Frequently listed strengths included relaxation and heckling, whereas weaknesses included no research, unclear rules, and less respect from other sectors of the forensic community.

I firmly believe that debate rounds can and should be fun. I also am convinced that debate rounds must be exercise in argumentation. One parliamentary coach, whose debaters enjoy a great deal of regional and national success, told me that he requires his debaters to read and discuss the first four chapters of a popular debate text before they begin tournament debating. This contrasts sharply with ballot comments such as:

> This is not CEDA! Don't speed through the round and don't give me harms, etc. I don't need a line by line analysis.

> Watch the CEDA mode. You're using a lot of debate terminology.

Some in the community adhere to be a popular view that arguing "line by line" or using debate terminology is anti-parliamentary style. I view these habits as nothing more than good debate, understanding that any good thing is potentially abused. Parliamentary norms that I find troubling reinforce non-argumentative approaches to academic debate.

Rules Governing the Format

Earmarking parliamentary rules as a point of concern is a bit misleading. Information provided by NPDA is prefaced by pointing out that the organization has never endorsed a set of rules for parliamentary debate. This is particularly interesting, given the tendency for parliamentary critics and participants to ground their views of parliamentary debate in "the rules" of parliamentary and how they differ from those of CEDA or NDT. The effect of NPDA providing information for participants are unofficial "rules" for debaters in parliamentary debate.

The majority of parliamentary "rules" are not only reasonable, but facilitate sound argumentative practices. Two aspects of the rules concern me--an inclusion and an omission. Academic debate teaches the valuable skills of research and usage of evidence. Parliamentary discourages the use of specific knowledge (facts not in the public domain) and bans any published material being brought into the debate round. There are a number of skills that evidence usage demonstrates. Hollihan and Baaske

(1994) write, "...no matter how well read you are, or even how well you have lived, there will come a time when your personal knowledge will be insufficient to convince an audience" (p. 109). While I sympathize with concerns that some debate formats allow an overemphasis on evidence, banning its use in another format reminds me of the analogy of throwing the baby out with the bath water. Absent individual event experiences, parliamentary debaters' training in argumentation makes void critical components of academic debate.

A troubling omission from parliamentary debate rules is a cross examination period. I have always felt that cross examination is a valuable part of an academic debate. Wilbanks and Church (1991) observe that cross examination is an important part of any debate" (p. 175). They add:

> A(n) effective cross examination period can focus the debate on the issues one considers important and to clarify any ambiguity that lingers after the opposition has spoken. With the time constraints in place during most debates, any additional opportunity to accomplish those goals should not be squandered (p. 175).

Defending arguments in the face of questioning tests how well debaters can defend their ideas, as opposed to merely reading or reciting them from files, partner prompting, or pre-round coaching. Constructive speeches may be interrupted by questions, but speakers have the freedom to refuse questions. Additionally, time restrictions prevent questioners from developing strategic questioning techniques.

With these two exceptions, there is nothing intrinsic to parliamentary debate rules, the format, or suggestions from NPDA

that detract from educational debate. Parliamentary practices and what participants view as parliamentary rules sometimes make parliamentary debate less than educational.

Administration of Parliamentary Debate

My final area of concern dealing with parliamentary debate is its administration. Most tournament administrators take an extremely conscientious approach to administering parliamentary divisions. There are, however, exceptions. Perhaps it is my bad luck, but I seem to encounter these exceptions with more frequency than I would like. Three administration issues are addressed herein: assignment of judges, assignment of sweepstakes points for parliamentary debate, and topic writing.

Every tabulation room approaches judge assignment differently. Ideally, judges get assigned to divisions in which they have entries. But this is not always the case. It appears that a correlation exists between the amount of debate experience (or perhaps credibility as a debate judge) a person has and the likelihood of being assigned to parliamentary debate--the less experience (or credibility), the more likely a parliamentary debate judging assignment is given. This tendency goes to the extreme when in the face of judge shortages competitors judge their peers. This is not an indict on undergraduate judging, but rather a concern about allowing a student to evaluate peers who s/he competes against. If expert judges are not assigned to parliamentary debate, the problems outlined elsewhere in this paper will proliferate. I understand that parliamentary debate

perpetuates a style of debate appropriate for general audiences. I also know that, regardless of the intended audience, academic debate occurs in an educational laboratory wherein students learn to argue well. The degree of learning that takes place in a debate round is commensurate, to a great degree, with the ability of the adjudicator to provide appropriate, sound feedback.

A second problem with parliamentary debate and tournament administration lies in the awarding of sweepstakes points for parliamentary debate. This never-ending controversy still thrives between some of my forensic colleagues and me. With the present practice of parliamentary debate, I resist awarding the same amount of sweepstakes points for a parliamentary team that are awarded for a CEDA/NDT team. I understand that this position results in parliamentary debate being viewed as less legitimate than other debate formats, but that is not my perception. I contend, however, that the work required of a "serious" CEDA/NDT team is much more than the work required of a "serious" parliamentary team. The survey administered at a recent tournament confirms my feelings. Of the 32 judges surveyed, 25 felt serious CEDA/NDT debaters exert 10 or more hours of work a week, while 21 felt that serious parliamentary debaters devote less than 10 hours per week. I know of several programs that enter students in parliamentary debate in an effort to gain sweepstakes points or to fill their down time between individual events rounds. The demands of event, when possible, ought to be computed into the sweepstakes formula for tournaments. (This

issue is addressed in greater detail later in the paper.)

Topic writing is the final tournament administration concern that deals with parliamentary debate. Having served for two years on the CEDA topic writing committee, I gained a profound respect for individuals before me and in other organizations who have struggled to write good resolutions. At this point no constraints (that I am aware of) prevail on the types of resolutions used from tournament to tournament. Debate texts discuss types of propositions, and the burdens associated with debating each. They also discuss characteristics of good and poor resolutions. Topics from recent tournaments I have attended include (paraphrased):

> This House believes that Elvis is alive and serving a term in the U.S. Senate.
>
> This House believes that superfluous is necessary.
>
> This House believes that Daffy Duck is better than Donald Duck.
>
> This House stands resolved that boxers are better than briefs.
>
> This House believes that what you see is what you get.

Certainly debaters can interpret these and other resolutions like them in ways that address "serious" issues. Nonetheless, these resolutions perpetuate the practices I have alluded to earlier in this paper. One resolution that troubles me a great deal appeared in a final round at a recent tournament. This tournament featured a team from Rice University in the final round, debating:

> THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT RICE IS BEST WHEN SERVED HOT.

The all upper-case presentation of the resolution is important. Rice debaters asked if "rice" was a proper or common noun; it was all upper-case. This illustrates two problems. First, one of the two teams debating for a tournament championship is placed in a very awkward position. To few peoples' surprise, Rice University was the focus of the case argued by the government. Second, the topic suggests the same light-hearted treatment of debate issues that is argued above. In fact, two students just left my office as I wrote this, asking why, of all the topics to debate about, we would want to debate about food--further evidence of my concerns.

Modest Proposals for Reform

As has been clarified throughout this paper, I do not mean to assess a blanket indict on parliamentary debate. I also understand that few of these concerns represent structural problems in parliamentary debate, but show symptoms of current trends in its practice. Nevertheless, there are a number of suggestions for improving parliamentary debate as a viable exercise in educational debate.

Formalize Topic Writing

The resolution debated largely determines the quality of debates. Parliamentary organizations should develop a means of sanctioning tournaments based on the quality of its topics. Organizations might even establish guidelines for resolutions, such as a variety of fact, value and policy topics, lists of approved topics written by committee, or specific issues around

which topics should be written that can vary by month or semester. Tournament directors should solicit feedback on topics from colleagues attending or even not attending their tournaments. Writing resolutions that ensure fairness, balance, and saliency may pose a difficult task that should be taken seriously.

Allow Research in Debate Rounds

This suggestion can springboard off of the proposals for formalized topic writing. Parliamentary tournaments might consider announcing areas, or a single area in which resolutions are framed. With this information provided in tournament invitations, students may at least acquire background information that will add substance to debates. At this point there is no brightline (**NOT a term unique to CEDA/NDT**) for determining what constitutes specific knowledge. Framing that designation will allow students to learn applications of research and evidence in the debate process. Another suggestion is similar to the NFL's treatment of high school Lincoln-Douglas debate. Topics can be announced every two months or so, allowing students to make use of research, but not generate an unreasonable amount for use in the tournament. Even a limit on the amount of evidence in a debate round would improve the status quo.

Promote Scholarship About Parliamentary Debate

Most critics tire of hearing their colleagues cited in debate rounds as evidence of the appropriateness of a specific approach to debate. Nevertheless, debate is heuristic--it is a

forum for students to theorize about argument (Gass, 1987). Stifling the presence of theory in any academic debate format accomplishes little more than students having less of a foundation for the skills that they practice. Theory arguments need not be a series of cited theorists. What theory in argumentation contexts allows for is a generation of knowledge and ideas about how we argue, something that seems quite relevant in an argumentation laboratory. Cirlin (1996) writes that "theory should not be the essence of the performance; it should be for the benefit of the performer" (p. 62). While principle dictates this, the point lost in this opinion is that debate is not about performance so much as it is about a process wherein advocacy is tested. At the very least, parliamentary critics should accept the students' efforts to develop theory within the debate round. To reject such practices is to place a prior restraint on our students that chills the development of the very argumentation skills we ought to be teaching in debate rounds.

Evaluative Criteria that Emphasizes Substance Over Style

Humor is great in a debate round. Students who do not have fun while competing take the wrong approach to this activity. However, students must first and foremost strive to learn the skills relevant to the events in which they compete. Debate should teach skills such as advocacy, argument development, refutation of others' arguments, research, etc. Practices that encourage role-playing or otherwise entertaining presentations grow dangerous when substantive issues are de-emphasized or

disregarded. Critics in parliamentary debate rounds should reward presentation and strategy only to the extent that it allows for (or does not detract from) discussion of salient issues.

Ban Time/Space Cases

Parliamentary rules generally forbid specific knowledge. Yet, debaters can place all participants in the debate round into any context they deem appropriate. One of my teams recently debated a parliamentary round that was set in 1987 Russia. The problem? Some students do not have the first clue about Russia in 1996, let alone 1987. This option shows inconsistency with the specific knowledge restriction. An even greater problem with time/space cases is the perpetuation of counterfactual argumentation. Counterfactual arguments "assert that certain results would (be) obtain(ed) if conditions were different than they presently are" (Broda-Bahm, 1995, p. 73). For a format designed to encourage debates appropriate for a general audience, this poses a problem as Broda-Bahm notes:

> Despite this utility, however, the presentation of counterfactual claims within a debate context is often met with confusion. It seems that we are capable of handling the implicit counterfactual arguments which are contained in all causal statements with little difficulty, but when the counterfactual components of those claims become explicit, they are treated as uniquely incomprehensible arguments. Clearly what is needed is a template for understanding counterfactual claims (p. 76).

Debaters should be forced to debate in the here and now as a way of helping create fairness in their interpretation of resolutions, as well as a de-emphasis on role-playing.

Conduct Judging Workshops and Provide Judging Guidelines

Academic freedom, to a great degree, extends to critics in academic debate rounds. Nonetheless, many critics are new to adjudicating parliamentary debate. Workshops and guidelines can help guide novice parliamentary judges through their first rounds. My wife, for example, has judged collegiate debate for four years--including two national CEDA tournaments and one national Pi Kappa Delta tournament. Yet, she recently had to ask a debater in a parliamentary round to get things started by reading the resolution and calling the house to order. She is an excellent critic of argument, but did not attend to what she felt were peripheral matters in the debate round. The students in the round evidently felt that these procedures were not formalities. As long as this format continues to grow in its popularity, several individuals will be adjudicating it for the first time.

Define the Mission of Parliamentary Debate

I am often reminded that parliamentary debate is not CEDA debate. I wholeheartedly agree. What I have yet to learn, however, is a more elaborate definition or mission of parliamentary debate. Parliamentary debate organizations must define their mission within the forensic arena and communicate that mission to students and educators. Rules and guidelines make the most sense when the intent for them is clearly communicated. Students of parliamentary debate should know what skills they will learn (ideally) as a result of their participation. Clearly communicated mission statements are

critical to the accountability of organizations and activities, particularly in the face of increasing fragmentation of debate approaches.

Add Cross Examination

Forcing students to defend their advocacy in the face of interrogation is invaluable. In CEDA and NDT debate, as well as in Lincoln-Douglas rounds the only opportunity I have as a critic to compare advocacy skills in the face of pressure is the cross-examination period. This three minutes provides teams with opportunities to clarify misunderstandings, penetrate weaknesses in opponents' arguments, build strategy, and communicate their competence in a less formal speech. All debate formats benefit immeasurably from this opportunity--parliamentary can enjoy similar benefits.

Conclusion

I do not wish to argue a blanket indict of parliamentary debate. On the contrary, I hope that parliamentary debate continues to grow. I have students who can learn a great deal about argumentation--more than they will learn in their individual events. To date, parliamentary debate is an excellent alternative that does not require the labor necessary to participate seriously in CEDA/NDT debate. However, I can not in good conscience support activities unless I am confident that my students can grow through positive educational experiences. I am sorry to say that, at present, I lack that confidence in parliamentary debate.

I hope that as other debate formats work through their growing pains, parliamentary debate will be responsive in its evolution to forensic community concerns. Diversity is a strong suit of today's collegiate forensic arena. With more choices come more opportunities for students to grow and benefit competitively and educationally. This House hopes that parliamentary debate will overcome its weaknesses and realize its vast potential. Now that is a resolution I would like to affirm.

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